

Beierle Farm  
Denver International Airport Site  
Hudson Road & 96th Avenue  
Denver  
Denver County  
Colorado

HABS No. CO-124

HABS  
COLO  
16-DENV,  
63-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BEIERLE FARM

HABS No. CO-124

HABS  
COLO  
16-DENV  
63-

Location: Southeast 1/4 of the Southwest 1/4 of the Northwest 1/4 of Section 24, Township 2 South, Range 65 West, Sixth Prime Meridian. Denver County, Colorado. Vicinity of Watkins, Colorado.

UTM: 13: 532500, 4412500

Present Owner: Denver International Airport,  
City and County of Denver

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: None

Statement of Significance: As a complex, the current Beierle Farm offers an example of the work process and flow of a wheat and grain farm and its methods of operation. In particular the grain bins and scale house offer examples of facilities frequently used by farmers in the area. Other buildings testify to the evolution of the farm from a dairy to a grain farm.

The Beierle Farm also has significance as an example of farm evolution and development by Adams County, Colorado, tenant farmers. Tenant farming was a common pattern of land use and livelihood for much of the area during most of the twentieth century. The Ray Beierle family worked as tenant farmers for more than fifty years. They worked at this farm for three different landlords, the Grossmans, the District Land Owners Trust and finally for Box Elder Farms until 1990. In addition, the Beierle Farm house is a significant example of an 1890s vernacular hipped cottage.

Project Statement: This Historic American Building Survey recording project is part of both the historic preservation plan for the Denver International Airport and a long term program to document historically significant buildings in the United States. The City and County of Denver through the Denver International Airport provided funding for the project.

The field work, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the direction of Deborah Andrews of Andrews & Anderson under contract to the City and County of Denver. Deborah Andrews, Nanon Anderson, Karen Hardaway and Jim Fischer of Andrews & Anderson did the field measurements and architectural delineations. Arnold Thallheimer undertook the photography. Steven Mehls of Western Historical Studies, under sub-contract to Andrews & Anderson, served as project historian.

Historian:

Steven F. Mehls, Western Historical  
Studies, Inc., March 10, 1992

PART I. HISTORICAL DATA

Date of Erection: ca 1890

Architect: William Arter (builder)

Historical Narrative:

The Beierle Farm is a recently abandoned farmstead with standing structures. It is named for Mr. Ray Beierle. Mr. Beierle lived at the site, intermittently, as a tenant farmer from 1931 until his death in 1990, making him the longest tenured occupant of the farm. He claimed that the place was formerly known as the "Lone Tree Ranch," named after a large cottonwood that once stood behind the main house. This tree supposedly was planted by Mormons to mark a trail along Box Elder Creek which lies about three-quarters of a mile east of the farm. The Beierle family referred to the cottonwood as the "Mormon tree." No evidence has been found to substantiate or refute this assertion, however, the stump of a large cottonwood is extant behind (east) of the main house. The tree remained until the 1960s when Beierle had it removed. Limbs had fallen on the roof of the house and Beierle feared the entire tree, then dying, might fall through the roof.<sup>1</sup>

According to historical records, the site also could be referred to as the Arter, Knapff, or Hill farm. The land containing this farm was patented by William Arter as a Cash Entry patent from the General Land Office. The purchase gave Arter title to 160 acres (the NW 1/4 of Section 24, Township 2S, Range 65W.) on August 19, 1891 (see data page 15).<sup>2</sup> He may have believed the rampant publicity about rain following the plow and the desert succumbing to the hardworking farmer. However, like hundreds or thousands of others, Arter appears to have failed to appreciate the precarious nature of high plains farming.<sup>3</sup> Rains failed to come and Arter sold the 160 acres to Gustav Knapff on January 7, 1893.<sup>4</sup>

Arter's optimism regarding the possibilities of success were not totally unfounded. During the late 1880s a series of circumstances came together to make those years profitable ones for farmers on the high plains that would become Adams County and eventually the Denver International Airport. Much of the range was over-grazed, abandoned by ranchers, and then occupied by farmers. Precipitation fell at heavier than usual rates during those years. This precipitation included the blizzards of 1887 and 1888, which significantly added to the problems for many of the open range ranches. Many ranchers abandoned their lands

because of the high cattle mortality rate from the blizzards. These deaths combined with falling cattle prices discouraged other ranchers.

Temporarily adequate water, higher grain prices, and the availability of former ranch lands encouraged farmers to settle areas which they previously shunned. New advances in farm machinery, including the use of steam powered tractors, allowed individuals to plant and harvest a larger acreage. Increases in plowed acreage coincided with a decline in livestock prices and numbers throughout northeastern Colorado. The pace of land claiming and patenting increased steadily throughout the 1890s. Many thousands of acres of Union Pacific grant lands were occupied during this time as well. The rapid pace of land patenting indicates that farmers and speculators alike viewed the west-central Adams County area as open for development.<sup>5</sup>

Arter may have been more a speculator than a farmer, making only minimal improvements aside from the house. The Knapff family clearly hoped to be successful farmers. They owned this farm for nearly twenty years and made a number of permanent improvements, including outbuildings that are no longer present. Their residency started during one of the bleakest of all times for Colorado farmers. The Panic of 1893 which all but ended Colorado silver mining also devastated the state's farmers. Bank failures forced loans to be called in, and the problems in the mining camps led to decreased markets. But the most devastating problem for farmers came from nature. The mid-1890s were extremely dry years. Farmers through out the future Adams County, no doubt including the Knapffs, watched as their crops withered in the fields.<sup>6</sup> These problems passed and the rains returned by the closing years of the decade.

In the first decade of the 1900s, the Knapffs grew a variety of crops, including winter wheat, corn, maize and a few sugar beets. There were chickens, a pig and other animals for domestic use, but not for commercial sales. Eggs or other produce may have been sold to passing travellers, but certainly not on a large scale basis. Large scale sugar beet cultivation, profitable in other areas of Adams County, was labor intensive, required transportation to market and used large amounts of water. For the Knapffs, irrigation was more a dream than a reality. Gustav died in 1911 and his widow, Frederica, sold most of the 160 acre farm. She remained at the house for another year before selling the last parcel. On October 26, 1912 Frederica Knapff of Denver sold the farmstead to George S. and Clara M. Hill of Denver for \$250 as part of the Gustav Knapff estate settlement.<sup>7</sup>

In the aftermath of the late nineteenth century dryland failures a number of agronomists addressed the problem of farming the high plains. Professor Hardy W. Campbell of the University of Nebraska in Lincoln lead this effort. Simplified, Campbell's theories held that cyclic field use followed by fallow periods combined with deep tilling could increase the water retention ability of the soils. Given a year or two between crop plantings, adequate moisture would accumulate for successful crop planting approximately every third year. Campbell's work spurred others, including the State Agricultural College (now Colorado State University), to experiment with new drought resistant crops. Agronomists published the results of their work, providing much new information to farmers and would be farmers. Additionally, state schools and private companies introduced dozens of new machines to help farmers in their toil. These factors combined to lead to dramatic growth in Adams County agricultural output during the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> The changes, especially the on-going developments in labor saving machinery, meant that fewer people could successfully cultivate more land.

The Hills, heirs to these new farming philosophies, were typical of many other families in rural Adams County and much of rural America in that they acquired the Knapff property to have a farm near other family members. Clara Hill was the daughter of Louis and Barbara Yoksch, who owned the adjacent quarter section (NE 1/4 of Section 24). The Hill and Yoksch families may have operated their farms as one unit. Clara Hill inherited her parents' land in 1922.<sup>9</sup> Coincidentally for the Hills, World War I (1914-1919) brought higher prices for agricultural products. As European production declined, American production increased along with prices. The Hills were able to take advantage of this increase and apparently put all available acreage into production. In the 1920s, George Hill passed away and Clara remarried. Her new family had less interest in farming. By the end of the decade, they moved to Denver, Colorado and tenants began running the farm. During the 1920s the 200 acre Hill farm was slightly below the average size of 257 acres for farms in Adams County, but it was among the majority in that it was owner operated. By the late 1920s, as Clara Grossman (nee Yoksch and Hill) was preparing to sell the farm, the average farm size had grown, with most of the land in the County being farmed in units of more than 300 acres. In addition, the value of farms in the County declined by approximately 25%.<sup>10</sup> Clara Grossman seemingly understood the worsening economic situation and sold the SW 1/4, SW 1/4, NW 1/4 and the NE 1/4 of Section 24 (her parents' old farm) to the District Landowners Trust on February 21, 1931.<sup>11</sup>

During the 1910s and 1920s farmers and speculators awaited completion of the Highline Extension canal system and the expected increase in land prices once the irrigation system became operational. Unfortunately by the mid-1920s the final court appeals regarding the Highline Extension system failed to secure water for the canal (see HAER CO-67). The District Landowners Trust already controlled thousands of acres of land in the vicinity of the Grossman property as a result of the Highline Extension canal failure. In order to profitably use the properties, the District Landowners Trust rented land to tenant farmers under various arrangements, or hired men to farm Trust lands. Ray Beierle, a native of Adams County, born in a house at modern Picadilly Road and Bromley Lane, was one of the Trust's hired farmers during the 1920s.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the District Landowners Trust's canal-related difficulties, adverse weather conditions further impacted agricultural markets already weakened by the stock market crash of 1929. After several wet years, the early 1930s saw below average rainfall. The natural aridity of the region combined with increased tillage of marginal lands caused once rich fields to blow away in wind storms. The winds of 1932-33 caused so called dust blizzards or "Dusters." These storms were regularly reported on daily radio and newspapers with the weather forecast. Northeastern Colorado, including Adams County, was not designated by the Federal government as a part of the Great Depression "Dust Bowl." Adams County farmers and ranchers suffered like their counterparts in the southern portion of the state. For example, regional historian Margaret Long, who spent many years studying trails in the area, took many photographs of dust drifts blocking highways and fields along U.S. Highway 40 during the 1930s. Highway 40 is located a dozen or so miles south of the Beierle Farm.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, those who could afford to left Adams County and the state searching for better opportunities, frequently in California. For those that remained, tenant farmer status was an alternative.

During the 1930s considerable land acquisition and ownership consolidation activity took place in the Denver International Airport area. L. C. (Cal) Fulenwider, who had moved to Colorado in 1904 for health reasons, purchased approximately 40,000 acres during that decade. One of his tax sale purchases was the Beierle Farm. With financial backing from the Van Schaack Real Estate company, Fulenwider paid back taxes on the Beierle Farm and others in the area. To manage these properties he founded

Box Elder Farms, a family enterprise. A court battle ensued over the legality of these purchases but Fulenwider was awarded title by the courts in 1939. Fulenwider was not alone as an absentee landlord. Land ownership maps indicate that by the late 1930s absentee ownership and tenant farming dominated Denver International Airport land use.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of the Beierle Farm, Adams County sold it to Fulenwider on December 22, 1937 for \$935.14 owed for the back taxes. The property was part of Box Elder Farms<sup>15</sup> until it passed to the City and County of Denver by condemnation order on March 15, 1990, for construction of the Denver International Airport. The Beierle family vacated the property during the summer of 1990.<sup>16</sup>

As mentioned above, Ray Beierle began working as a tenant farmer on land owned by I. B. Melville and the District Landowners Trust during the 1920s. He also worked for other landlords. He married in 1929 and soon thereafter moved to the "Beierle Farm." His descendants believe the newlyweds moved to the farm in 1929 and were the tenants at the time of the farm sale by Grossman to the District Landowners Trust. Beierle resided at the Beierle Farm until 1938 or shortly after Fulenwider, through Box Elder Farms, purchased the property. In 1938, Ray Beierle moved his family to another farm near Erie, Colorado, about 30 miles north and west of the airport site. The Beierle family lived in Erie for a short period and then farmed near Hudson, Colorado, before moving to other Box Elder Farms properties. In 1945, the family returned to the Beierle Farm.<sup>17</sup>

Ray Beierle, with the help of his sons, Ray, Jr., and Harold, converted the farmstead from wheat and grain production to a dairy. The Beierles began dairying during the late 1940s and gradually increased the size of their herd and their operation. The family's physical improvements to the property focused on the barn. By 1956 they had made it a class A dairy barn. They also improved feed storage by adding the first of many grain bins at the farmstead. These metal bins provided a convenient and economical feed grain storage. In addition, the Beierles drilled a well to supply water to hay and alfalfa fields which provided forage for the dairy herd.<sup>18</sup> The Beierles and others in the area felt that the burgeoning population growth of the Denver metropolitan area during the years following 1945 provided an expanding market for dairy products. For example, in 1947 the Denver area, including Adams county, had 50 operating dairies.<sup>19</sup> Adams County became a county of city dwellers between 1950 and 1960. The 1960 census revealed that more than one-half of the



Adams County population lived in suburbs and cities. Moreover, the population growth during the decade (1950-1960) approached 300% (40,234 in 1950, 120,296 in 1960). Nonetheless, increasing production costs and competition by out-of-state producers had many Colorado dairymen either leaving the business or at least considering abandonment.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the dairy operation, Beierle also had to find ways to accommodate his growing family. When the family returned after World War II they initially inhabited the main house. When Harold married (mid-1950s) a second house was brought onto the farmstead for him and his bride.<sup>21</sup>

This pattern of a family concern operating the land as a unit was typical of many others in Adams County. In 1963 the Beierles quit dairying and converted their herds from dairy to feeder cattle. Throughout the middle and late 1960s Beierle had about 200 head of beef and dairy cattle on the farm. The family stayed in the cattle business for approximately twenty years. Beef cattle production methods the Beierles used in Adams County of the 1960s were vastly different from those typical of the area during the 1860s. As early as the 1890s, after the disastrous blizzards of the late 1880s and the over-grazing that had all but destroyed the range, cattle raisers began adopting practices such as winter feeding. Those changed practices led to the development of feeding and fattening as a standard operation for cattle raisers by the 1920s and 1930s in most of northeastern Colorado. That corner of the state came to dominate the cattle feeding industry. By the time the Beierles converted their operations, the northeastern part of the state, including Adams County, accounted for nearly 85% of the total feeder cattle being raised and marketed in Colorado.<sup>22</sup>

During the period of feed lot operation, Ray, Jr. moved away and his father partially retired. The farm was operated by Ray's son, Harold Beierle, as a tenant to Box Elder Farms from the early 1970s until the time of acquisition of the land by the City and County of Denver. After the Beierles ceased operation of the feed lot (ca. 1983) the main crop raised was dry-farmed winter wheat. Other crops grown by the Beierles included small amounts of barley and millet and limited amounts of corn on lands irrigated by wells. Beierle sold the corn to feed lots. The rest of the grain raised was sold to elevator companies. Chickens also were raised, but were not commercially marketed.<sup>23</sup> The farming patterns of Beierle's operation reflect those of the general area and the Denver International Airport area (see Overview, HABS CO-123, for more information).

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Information

The standing buildings at the Beierle farmstead include the main house, a second house, a garage, a chicken coop, a shop, a barn, six metal grain bins, a windmill, a pump house, a privy and a scale house and truck scale across the road from the main driveway. The house is an example of late nineteenth and early twentieth century vernacular, Colorado plains architecture and as it stands today represents typical types of modifications, such as an addition and new siding. Most of the main house's original fabric on the interior and exterior has been covered with modern materials. Also at the farmstead are two propane tanks for heating fuels and two water wells. Landscaping at the farm includes large spruce trees northwest of the main house as a shelter belt, the remains of a garden area and an orchard northeast of the windmill. Plowed fields of winter wheat surround the farmstead.

According to the older Mr. Beierle, the chicken house, garage, and barn date to the 1940s.<sup>24</sup> The Adams County appraisal cards for the property support those construction dates. The appraisal cards indicate both a 1929 and a 1948 date of construction for the chicken house. This may be due to an apparent fire in the building (see below). The cards also indicate the addition to the barn was built around 1958. The shop building was brought on to the site in the 1950s. The current garage was built during the 1970s to replace an earlier one that dated to the 1920s. The first metal grain bins were erected during the 1960s and others were added over the next ten years or so. The scale and scale shed were installed at their present location during the late 1930s, presumably after Box Elder Farms took possession of the property, and served the Beierles as well as other farmers in the immediate vicinity who worked for Box Elder Farms.<sup>25</sup>

PART III.

PROJECT INFORMATION

The Beierle Farm should not be directly impacted by any Phase I airport related facilities. Phase II Runway 19 may be built about 900 feet to the west of this site. When this runway is constructed, there will likely be some indirect impacts to the farmstead in the form of jet noise, vibration, and pollution. Until Phase II Runway 19 is built, plans are for the Beierle Farm to be avoided, protected and preserved in place. The City and County of Denver intends to allow a tenant to reside at the site during Phase I. The area around the farmstead will be kept in cultivated land, rented to farmers, as is currently the case with Box Elder Farms, so the site setting will not be altered. The condition of the site will be monitored over time by airport staff, with an annual monitoring report submitted to the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).

Present plans call for the Beierle Farm to be vacated and boarded up during Phase I airport operations. The airport managers will be responsible for periodic maintenance of the site aimed at stabilization and maintenance of the buildings in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Prior to actually carrying out any maintenance at the Beierle place, airport managers intend to provide the Colorado SHPO with an opportunity to review and approve such work.

Endnotes

1. Paul D. Friedman, "Historic Properties Preservation Plan for the New Denver International Airport, Denver County, Colorado," September 14, 1990, copy on file at New Denver International Airport Office, Stapleton International Airport, Denver, CO., p. 111; and Ray Beierle [Jr.], personal communications to Steven Mehls, 26 March, 7 April 1992, hereafter cited Beierle, personal communication.

2. U.S.D.I., Bureau of Land Management, Patent Records, Patent No. 15567, 19 August 1891, copy on file, Colorado State Office, Lakewood, CO.

3. Robert G. Athearn, The Coloradans, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), p. 141; C.L. Morgan Interview, Civil Works Administration, vol. 351, typescript on file, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, CO.; and Luella Bell McKenzie Interview, Civil Works Administration, vol. 350, typescript on file, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, CO.

4. Grantor Records, Books A-2, A-4, Records, Book 23, p. 408, Adams County Clerk and Recorder's Office, Brighton, CO.

5. U.S.D.I., Bureau of Land Management, "Historical Indices and Patent Records for Townships 1 through 5 south, Ranges 64-67 west," various dates, microfiche on file at Bureau of Land Management, Colorado State Office, Lakewood, CO.; Steven F. Mehls, The New Empire of the Rockies, A History of Northeastern Colorado, (Denver: Bureau of Land Management, 1984), pp. 72-74; and Anna Homm Interview, Civil Works Administration, vol. 350, typescript on file Colorado Historical Society, Denver, CO.

6. Homm Interview, CWA; McKenzie, CWA; and James Edward Wright, The Politics of Populism, Dissent in Colorado, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 98-99.

7. Grantee Records, Adams County Clerk and Recorder's Office.

8. Alvin T. Steinel, History of Agriculture in Colorado, (Denver: State Board of Agriculture, 1926), pp. 281-310. For a discussion of Campbell and well irrigation on the high plains after 1900 see: Donald E. Green, Land of Underground Rain, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973).

9. Grantee Records and Book 62, p. 545, Adams County Clerk and Recorder's Office.

10. No author, Colorado State Business Directory, (Denver: Gazetteer Publishing & Printing Co., 1928), p. 184; and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, Agriculture, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), p. 178; and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1930, Agriculture, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), pp. 256, 258.

11. Grantee Records, Adams County Clerk and Recorder's Office.

12. See: HAER CO-67 for more detail regarding the failure of the Highline Extension Canal; and Beierle, personal communication.

13. Mehls, New Empire, pp. 156-157; and Margaret Long Collection, box 21, ff 4, ff 5, ff 7, Western History Collections, Norlin Library, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO. Long's papers have many photographs of dust storms and drifts that typify the immediate area of the airport site.

14. Friedman, "Historic Properties," pp. 30-31; and Don C. Smith and Edmund Smith, A Smith Atlas, Adams County, Colorado. Flagler, CO: The Smith Map Co., Sept. 1, 1937; and Grantee Records, Adams County Clerk and Recorder's Office.

15. Grantee Records, Adams County Clerk and Recorder's Office.
16. Grantee Records and Receptions, 7509, 72300, 1990, City & County of Denver, Clerk and Recorder's Office, Denver, CO.
17. Beierle, personal communication.
18. Ibid; and Appraisal Card, 1725-00-0-00-057, Adams County Assessor's Office, Brighton, CO.
19. Denver Post, 22 August 1947.
20. Colorado State Planning Commission, Colorado State Yearbook, 1962-1964, (Denver: State of Colorado, 1964), pp. 577, 874.
21. Beierle, personal communication.
22. Yearbook, 1962-1964, p. 577; and see: David Allen Henderson, "The Beef Cattle Industry in Colorado," (M.A. Thesis, University of Colorado, 1951) for an overview of the changes taking place in Colorado cattle raising, especially after 1900.
23. Beierle, personal communication; P. Friedman, "Site Record, Site 5DV2957," 16 March 1989, copy on file, Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Denver, CO.; and Friedman, "Historic Properties," pp. 111-112.
24. Ibid.
25. Appraisal Card, Adams County Assessor's Office, Beierle, personal communication.

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# THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

To all to whom these Presents shall come, Greetings,

## CERTIFICATE

No. 15367

Whereas William H. Arter of the State of Colorado

has deposited in the General Land Office of the United States a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office of the State of Colorado whereby it appears that full payment has been made by the said William H. Arter

according to the provisions of the Act of Congress of the 24th of April, 1820, entitled "An Act making further provision for the sale of the Public Lands," and the acts supplemental thereto, for the North West quarter of Section twenty four in Township two South of Range five West of the 10th Principal Meridian in Colorado containing one hundred and eighty acres

according to the Official Plat of the Survey of the said Lands, returned to the General Land Office by the Surveyor General, which said Tract has been purchased by the said William H. Arter

Now know ye, That the United States of America, in consideration of the premises, and in conformity with the several Acts of Congress in such case made and provided, have given and granted, and by these presents do give and grant unto the said William H. Arter

and to his heirs, the said Tract above described, To have and to hold the same, together with all the rights, privileges, immunities, and appurtenances, of whatsoever nature, thereto in anywise belonging, unto the said William H. Arter

and to his heirs and assigns forever; subject to any vested and accrued water rights for mining, agricultural, manufacturing, or other purposes, and rights to ditches and reservoirs used in connection with such water rights as may be recognized and acknowledged by the local customs, laws, and decisions of courts, and also subject to the right of the proprietors of a vein or lode to extract and remove the ore therefrom, should the same be found to penetrate or intersect the premises hereby granted, as provided by law.

In testimony whereof, I, Benjamin Harrison, President of the United States of America, have caused these letters to be made Patent, and the seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed.

Given under my hand, at the City of Washington, the 11th day of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety one, and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and first.

By the President: Benjamin Harrison

Allen McFarland, Secretary

J. R. Conwell, Recorder of the General Land Office

Copy of Patent to the farmstead from United States to William Arter. Copy from microfiche on file at U. S. Bureau of Land Management, Colorado State Office, Lakewood, CO.